

Approved Draft Waterfront Committee Principles on New Waterfront Plan

Adopted by Alexandria Waterfront Committee, April 21, 2009

* Denotes principle taken from 1992 Old Town Small Area Plan

Approved Principles:

General Vision

- Alexandria is embarking on a once-in-a-generation planning effort for its Waterfront. Unlike most plans developed by the City, the Waterfront Plan shall encompass programs and activities in addition to land uses and capital improvements. The plan will envision Waterfront investments and activities for public and private sectors alike.
- Alexandria's Waterfront is and always has been a special mix of residential and commercial areas. The plan must balance residential, commercial and tourist interests as it seeks to enhance the enjoyment of the Waterfront by City residents, visitors, and workers alike.
- The Waterfront shall be a destination that attracts people of all ages and be accessible to people of all physical abilities.
- The Waterfront ambience shall emphasize Alexandria's history, maritime heritage and marine uses, recreation, and the arts.
- Development must preserve the historic scale and atmosphere of the current Waterfront area. Open panoramic views shall be protected.
- [There shall be] continuous public access along the Waterfront.*
- Visual awareness of the Waterfront should be [improved and] preserved.*
- The Waterfront should be attractive both to and from the river.

Uses/Zoning

- Encourage mixed use new development in areas where appropriate, particularly along the Waterfront.*
- Because of the importance of the water, and the relationship of inland areas to the water, the design of buildings along the Waterfront should be subjected to particularly close review.*
- To allow public access to and enjoyment of the Waterfront, there shall be maximum height limits and a required minimum setback from the water for all development.
- Encourage the design of new buildings in the Old Town Plan area on a basis that is compatible with existing development.*
- Development shall be compatible with the historic character of the Waterfront.
- Areas presently used for residential purposes should remain residential.*
- Waterfront development should be at a scale compatible with surrounding buildings.*
- Where opportunities exist, existing industrial sites should be converted to new uses.
- Encourage water-related activities and organizations in both water (marina) and adjacent to water.*

- Uses should promote both day and evening activities.
- Possible uses could include park uses that incorporate both active and passive recreation, a maritime museum, restaurants with outdoor/river views, boutique retail shops, an expanded marina with dock suitable for visiting tall ships, boutique hotel, amphitheater, and office/residential components.
- Uses shall capitalize on Waterfront vistas for the general public as well as from specific properties.
- Planning for the Waterfront shall entail consideration of other relevant plans such as the Wayfinding Initiative, the Motor Coach Task Force, the King Street Retail Plan, and other similar specific plans.

Commerce

- Alexandria's Waterfront has been a place of commerce since the City's founding in 1749 and shall continue to promote trade. The Waterfront is a vital conduit to maintaining a vibrant Old Town business district with thriving retail.
- Encourage the tourist potential of the historic, [arts, cultural,] and architectural aspects of Old Town.*
- Encourage more neighborhood-serving retail uses and discourage large-scale commercial buildings.*
- Investigate opportunities to incorporate retail and other appropriate commercial uses in the redevelopment of Waterfront industrial sites.

Environmental Constraints/Impact

- A preliminary step in Waterfront Planning must be an assessment of projected sea level rise on water levels in the Potomac River and the impact on the Alexandria Waterfront. Planning should not be based only on the shoreline that is visible today, but must also be based on the best available projections of shoreline 20 and 50 years from now.
- Determine a strategy for coping with sea-level rise and increased storm surge. A decision must be made given the best current knowledge to determine which lands are to be conceded to and which are to be defended.
- Complete flooding mitigation study and develop flooding mitigation plan for existing flood dangers.
- Flood-prone areas shall apply passive land uses to mitigate potential flood damage.
- Upgrade City sewer systems to eliminate combined sewer overflow and prevent sewer backups.
- Waterfront wetlands shall be preserved.
- The existing shoreline shall be maintained as much as possible, except for stabilization. No new landfill shall be allowed along Waterfront.
- The City shall encourage the use of environmentally sustainable construction and renovation approaches in accordance with the Environmental Action Plan.
- The waterfront shall be kept clean and free of manmade and natural debris.

- To the extent possible, waterfront features shall be engineered to limit the accumulation of debris.

Parks and Open Space

- Maintain and improve existing parks.
- Provide a continuous pedestrian pathway and bikeway along the entire Waterfront.*
- Preserve existing open space areas including residential side and rear yards wherever possible.*
- Developments along the Waterfront should provide ample open space.*
- The City should continue to acquire land as designated in its Open Space Plan to support recreational and/or environmental objectives.
- In accordance with the Environmental Action Plan and the very stringent requirements of the Virginia Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, which designates certain lands as Resource Preservation Areas (RPAs), there shall be a specified minimum setback from the water to provide ample bicycle and pedestrian access along the Waterfront.
- Fishing shall be permitted in designated locations.
- Parks may have features such as fountains and art. Parks shall not be sterile.
- New waterfront venues may feature gathering spaces, such as performance amphitheater, picnic pavilion, or porch-style swings, where appropriate.

Historic Preservation

- Development along the Waterfront shall be respectful of Alexandria's history.
- Protect buildings and areas of historic and architectural value.*
- Require adaptive reuse of historic or architecturally interesting old structures.
- Historical markers, guides, and other interpretive materials along the entire length of the Waterfront, should acknowledge the full spectrum of Alexandria's history, not just the 17th and 18th centuries.
- Streetscapes (parks, public walkways, and other Waterfront areas, as well as building materials, lighting, signage, landscaping, etc.) must meet standards and be consistent with historic context.
- Maintain historic east-west vistas and preserve and designate historic corridors and arteries such as alleys, former railways, and the historic Alexandria Waterfront (along Lee and Fairfax streets).

Transportation

- Access to Alexandria's Waterfront shall be facilitated by a variety of transportation modes, including transit, bicycle, boat, and foot. Transportation options should distinguish Alexandria, such as the water taxi, trolley, and horse-drawn carriages.
- Transportation and parking are required to promote commerce and access recreation, but should not impinge on the Waterfront experience. This requires a comprehensive parking plan.

- Route through traffic and motor coaches away from established residential areas.
- Encourage maximum use of transit systems.
- The City shall consider traffic-free areas where appropriate.
- The King Street Trolley provides an essential link to the Waterfront and shall be preserved and enhanced.
- Open field parking should be eliminated and replaced by unobtrusive parking in structures that are compatible with the Waterfront area.
- Waterfront pathways shall be well-marked with appropriate wayfinding and interpretive signage.
- An interconnected pedestrian trail shall connect the Alexandria Waterfront from Daingerfield Island to Jones Point Park.
- Waterfront bicycle ways, including the Mount Vernon Trail, shall be well-marked and provide sufficient amenities such as adequate bike storage.
- The Waterfront plan should address the infrastructure needs of Waterfront-specific transportation modes.

Arts

- Alexandria's Waterfront shall be a showplace for the arts, including public, fine, and performing arts.
- Sculpture and other public art may be installed in parks and other public and private places along the Waterfront.
- An outdoor performing arts venue shall be considered for the Waterfront in an area designated for active recreation.
- Alexandria shall consider the implications of an arts district along the Waterfront.
- Consider including a cultural facility that would be an educational resource for the community as well as visitors, including visual arts, literary arts, music, drama, and dance.
- In the event that Waterfront redevelopment projects displace existing arts organizations located along the Waterfront, the City shall work with the organization to identify and secure new locations in same vicinity.

Safety and Security

- The City shall fund policing, security patrols, and capital investments required to ensure that the Waterfront and marina remain a safe and secure place to recreate.
- Apply site planning and architecture to improve visibility and dissuade street crime.
- Include activities that enliven the space during the day and evening, keeping enough activity to generate enough "population" to create a sense of safety.
- The Waterfront area requires adequate public restroom facilities, emergency call boxes, and other similar infrastructure to ensure public safety, comfort, and convenience.

Marina

- The City shall develop a strategic plan for the marina that establishes a clear mission, vision, and goals.
- The City shall then formulate a financial plan that meets the objectives of the strategic plan.
- The plan shall consider the needs of existing commercial and pleasure boat owners, residents, and tourists.
- The City shall ensure that Potomac River waterways remain accessible to watercraft eligible to use the marina and other docking facilities.

Waterfront Attractions

- The Waterfront shall have a sense of place that is unique to Alexandria.
- Waterfront walkways shall capitalize on Alexandria views of the Potomac, the U.S. Capitol, and other landmarks.
- New waterfront venues may include attractions for children such as a playground, splash park, and/or interactive public art, where appropriate.
- Entertainers, especially period entertainers, and historic interpreters shall be encouraged in public gathering places such as the marina boardwalk.
- Special events such as the Waterfront festival and tall ships are an integral part of Alexandria's Waterfront experience and shall continue to be promoted.
- The Waterfront may incorporate an outdoor covered pavilion to serve as a gathering place.
- The foot of King Street should be focal point for the Waterfront and provide an open view of water to attract people.
- The Waterfront shall include vital public gathering places for large and small groups.
- Consider obtaining a tall ship for permanent display to serve as a tourist attraction that interprets maritime heritage.
- The City shall consider locating a maritime, archeology, or Alexandria history museum at the Waterfront.
- The City shall promote opportunities for small-scale recreational watercraft (non-motorized) such as canoes, kayaks, row boats and/or un-powered sail boats.

For future discussion:

Note: Numbering is provided only for the purposes of facilitating discussion and does not indicate prioritization. Numbers will be changed to bullets in the final draft.

General Vision

1. Encourage water-related development along sections of the Waterfront.*
[Request to clarify what "waterfront-related development" entails.]
2. Waterfront should be open and accessible both to and from the river.

Environmental Constraints/Impact

1. To achieve the City's goal of a citywide tree canopy of 40 percent, the planting of trees shall be encouraged along the Waterfront. Trees should not obscure sight lines to the river.

Transportation

1. Waterfront pathways shall be well-marked with well-lighted pathways and appropriate wayfinding and interpretive signage. [modification to approved principle]
2. Ensure that parking in the vicinity of the waterfront is adequate to serve existing businesses.

Parks & Open Space

1. Parks are an essential element of the Waterfront and shall provide a mixture of active and passive uses. [Request discussion of what constitutes active & passive use.]

Marina

1. Consideration should be given to a community boating program on the waterfront, where the public could take classes in sailing, boating, and water safety.
2. All docks should be floating, with appropriate ladders and sufficient pilings (by number and size) to accommodate a variety of craft, be they pleasure or commercial.

Waterfront Attractions

1. New waterfront venues may include attractions for children such as a playground, splash park, a place to touch the water, and/or interactive public art, where appropriate. [modification to approved principle]